

STATEMENT BY U.S. SENATOR BENJAMIN L. CARDIN
COMMEMORATING THE 60th ANNIVERSARY
OF ISRAEL'S INDEPENDENCE
May 2008

It is with great pleasure and pride that I join in the celebration this month of a landmark moment for democracies and free societies worldwide: the 60th anniversary of the founding of the modern State of Israel and the end of the British Mandate of Palestine.

May 14, 1948 (*5th day of the Jewish lunar month Iyar*/May 8, 2008) marks Israel's Independence Day or Yom Ha'atzmaut. It was on this day 60 years ago that pioneering statesman David Ben-Gurion proclaimed Israel's independence, establishing a sovereign homeland for the Jewish people within a territory that has seen a continuous Jewish presence for thousands of years.

Modern Israel may be a relatively young nation, but it is a vibrant oasis of democracy in a region of the world replete with secular and religious dictators. Israel has withstood near constant military and terrorist threats, economic boycotts, and diplomatic hostility. Yet it still stands as a thriving, pluralistic democracy where the rule of law and an independent judiciary work to protect freedom of speech, association and religion; a free press; and, fair and open elections.

This year, as it has on many occasions, we in Congress have recognized the special relationship between the United States and Israel based on democratic values and strategic interests. As an institution, we have reaffirmed our support for Israel as it pursues peace with its neighbors and we reaffirmed our support for Israel's right to defend itself against threats to its security and its existence. We are committed to strengthen the bonds of friendship and cooperation between our two countries.

Over six decades, Israel has transformed an arid desert into thriving farmlands and a worldwide hub for agricultural technology, information and communications, energy and medical research, theoretical physics and engineering. Eight Israeli citizens have been awarded Nobel Prizes. Perhaps out of necessity, Israel also has become a world leader in search-and-rescue techniques, responding with humanitarian aid and emergency relief to help victims of natural and man-made disasters on nearly every continent. Without a doubt, they are a major player on the global social and economic stage.

I congratulate the people of Israel on reaching this milestone and wish them prosperous future built on a foundation of peace and security.